

THE COST OF WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Madam Speaker, I follow the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) and I do share his frustration as well. Mine is a little different, though. It is the cost of war in Afghanistan. My concern is, as the President has decided to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, I join my colleagues in both parties, and BARBARA LEE from California, in saying that we should debate this policy on the floor of the House.

I am one that is very upset that this Nation, since World War II, we never declare war anymore, we just pass resolutions on the floor and we give the President, whether it be a Republican or Democrat, the authority to make decisions to go ahead and send troops into certain areas.

I do agree with Mr. Obama, the war should have always been Afghanistan and we should not have gone into Iraq, but that is history now. The problem is we are 9 years after we went into Afghanistan and now we are trying to catch up for the 8 years we spent in Iraq.

Down in Camp Lejeune, which is in my district, the Third District of North Carolina, the day that Mr. Obama made the announcement that we would send 30,000 more troops to combat in Afghanistan, I want to read, Madam Speaker, just a few comments that were in the Jacksonville paper—again, that is the home paper for Jacksonville, North Carolina and, again, the home of Camp Lejeune Marine Base.

“With White House officials saying that President Obama will order about 30,000 more troops, including a brigade of marines from Camp Lejeune, into combat in Afghanistan, local military are reacting to the news with skepticism and concern.”

Further down in the article, it says: Marine Sergeant Doug Copeland, who is scheduled to deploy with his 1st Battalion, 8th Marines in October, said he approved of the troop surge as a means to assist troops already on the ground, but believed a date for leaving the country was coming too late. “We should have dealt with Afghanistan in the first place,” Copeland said. “We’ve already been in this war for 7 or 8 years. We’ve got to call it quits. Our country needs to focus on our country now.”

That is exactly what Mr. DEFAZIO was saying. This country is in bad financial shape, we are losing jobs every day, and what we need to do is concentrate on this country itself.

I will read just another comment, Madam Speaker:

“HM2 Cagney Noland, a corpsman currently with Combat Logistics Regiment 27, said he doubted the proposed timeline would see troops out of Afghanistan.”

Madam Speaker, the number of our troops with PTSD, with TBI, and with mental depression and anxiety is growing each and every day. Again, I have gotten to know many of the marines down at Camp Lejeune, from privates all the way up to generals. They will go and fight for this country, they want to do everything they can to defend this country and they will give their life, but we need to take into consideration the stress that we are putting on these troops.

There is another article I want to make brief reference to that was in the New York Times on December 3 by Nicholas Kristof. It’s called, “Johnson, Gorbachev, Obama.” It is about the Vietnam War, it is about the Russians involved in Afghanistan, and now Mr. Obama’s decision.

I am not trying to second-guess the President. He’s got a very difficult job, and I wish him well. In fact, I was one of the few Republicans that thanked him for taking his time before he decided what the solution should be or what the strategy should be for Afghanistan. But Madam Speaker, I think that we as a Congress should debate the policy.

I said this just a moment ago, and I would like to say it again, I joined BARBARA LEE in a letter to the Speaker of the House asking the Speaker of the House to please let us debate the policy of what we should be doing in Afghanistan before we pass any type of supplemental to financially support the troops. So, therefore, it is my hope that maybe in January or February of 2010 we will be granted a debate on the floor, whether it be for sending more troops to Afghanistan or fewer troops to Afghanistan, and we will come closer to meeting our constitutional responsibility than we have done, truthfully, since World War II.

Madam Speaker, I would like to close as I always do. I have signed over 8,000 letters to families and extended families in this country because I regret that I ever voted to give President Bush the authority to send troops to Iraq. That is my pain that I’ve lived with, and writing the letters and signing the letters to the families is my way of saying I’m sorry that I did not meet my constitutional responsibility and vote my conscience on the floor of this House.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to close these brief comments by asking God to please bless our men and women in uniform, ask God to please bless the families of our men and women in uniform, and ask God to please, in his loving arms, hold the families who have given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. I would like to ask God to please give the House and Senate strength to do what is right for the next generation. I would like to ask God to give strength and wisdom and courage to the President of the United States. And I close by asking three times, God please, God please, God please continue to bless America.

RETURN TO JOB GROWTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY of Virginia. Madam Speaker, in our ongoing efforts to stabilize the economy and ensure a return to prosperity, our focus must remain fixed on the saving and creation of American jobs. The actions of this administration and this Congress have shown progress. Job losses fell dramatically, and the unemployment rate dropped in November from 10.2 percent to 10 percent.

The recession began in 2007 and has been the worst since World War II. Unemployment hit a 26-year high, consumer confidence plummeted, the gross domestic product contracted at near unprecedented levels, the stock market plunged, home prices tumbled and foreclosures skyrocketed, and millions of Americans found themselves out of work.

Monthly job losses continued to worsen each month. In September of 2008, the monthly losses were more than 300,000. By December of 2008 and January of 2009, in the waning days of the Bush administration, job losses exceeded 700,000. And it wasn’t just 2008. Under the Clinton administration, from 1993 to 2000 the average monthly private job growth was 217,000, one of the most robust job growths in American history. During the Bush 8 years, that average monthly job creation was just 2,000.

□ 1700

As this Congress and the Obama administration took office in January, we were facing a job market in free fall. We immediately took action on a number of fronts.

The Recovery Act provided critically important investments, saving or creating 1.6 million jobs so far. States and localities faced with growing budget deficits would have been forced to lay off hundreds of thousands of teachers, police and fire fighters, but the Recovery Act saved those jobs, including, in my district, 404 teachers in Fairfax County and 304 in Prince William County. The Recovery Act created thousands of additional jobs in road construction, clean energy, and medical research. Businesses in my district received at least 205 contracts, grants, and loans, totaling almost \$200 million, thanks to the Recovery Act. They have had a noticeable impact.

The employment rate in my district began to fall in advance of the national rate, declining in October from 5.3 to 5.2 percent in Prince William County, and from 4.7 to 4.5 percent in Fairfax, half the national average.

The House of Representatives reauthorized the COPS program, which will add 50,000 police officers nationwide. The 21st Century Green Schools Act and the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act invested billions of more dollars to modernize public